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Acts 13:1-3

Outward Church: Is God calling you to ministry?

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Is God calling you to ministry? Do you ever sense God might want you to serve him in church ministry or in missions? I'm not talking about frontline ministry today—serving God at your normal everyday job. That's really important; but today's passage is about something else. Today's passage is the launch of a global missionary effort that changed the world. I'm wondering if God is calling you to be part of it.

I was around twelve years old when my friend walked into Sunday school and told us God told him he was going to become a pastor one day. Reflecting on it I was like, "Wow. That's so cool, but I could never do that." I used to sit in the pews imagining what it would be like to preach and be a pastor. If you're thinking those thoughts, or something similar, God might be doing something in you.

When I was a little bit older I remember one of the first times I tried coming up with a sermon illustration. I was on a hike with my brother and dad. The trail was going up and down and winding up and down the hill. I told my brother I thought the Christian life was a bit like our trail, with ups and downs with our walk with God. He wasn't impressed.

I tried to run away from Jesus in high school but like Jonah I ended up back where God wanted me. In college I began to promote my future self. One day I'll help out with Sunday school, then I'll serve as a Deacon, and finally an Elder. It wasn't till my college pastor said, "Hey, you should go to seminary" that someone voiced what my heart wanted. My heart leapt at the idea. I wanted to do that. If someone told you, "Hey, you should go to seminary? or Bible school?" would your heart leap at the idea, or is that just something you're not interested in. That's okay if not. But if so, don't ignore that feeling.

I wasn't ready yet. I told myself I'd work in the workforce for 10 years, make lots of money, then pay for seminary that way. God had different plans. When I started working for the Farm Credit Administration as an Associate Bank Examiner right out of college, it killed me. Maybe it would have killed you too; but God used that year to call me to church ministry.

That year I began to pray that God would send me to seminary, but with little faith that he would. Be careful what you pray for because he might just answer your prayers no matter your level of faith. Finally, I flew home one weekend and asked my dad what he thought of me becoming a pastor. He said, "If there's anything else you can do, you should do that..." There's truth to that. If your heart wants to be an engineer or a teacher or lawyer, go and do that. We need people doing those things as unto the Lord. God calls people to those kinds of jobs. We need people on the frontline finding others for Jesus. But for 1-2 of you, God might be calling you to a different trail, one that is a winding, up and down, walk with God.

That weekend I was home in Colorado my pastor preached a sermon on Psalm 90. I swear his first words were something like, "If there's something you're supposed to do, go and do it." I was like, "Well okay Lord!" That led me to seminary at Gordon-Conwell, then Immanuel Church, then starting Cornerstone. Is God calling you to ministry? Do you sense him speaking, him nudging? Don't ignore him.

The Holy Spirit might be calling you to ministry.

I want to tell you about a church where the Holy Spirit called people and sent them out into the world to start a worldwide Christian movement that's still growing and multiplying today.

Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. (ESV)

Here we find five all-stars the Holy Spirit calls. Here's what it tells us:

The Holy Spirit can call anyone.

Even you. Let's look at each one of them. Maybe they'll remind you of yourself, or who you're becoming.

Barnabas - Known, trusted, experienced.

We know Barnabas. We met him back in Acts 4 when he sold his property and gave it to the Apostles. His original name is "Joseph" but the Apostles renamed him to Barnabas because he was such an encourager. Barnabas was known and trusted in the Jerusalem church. He vouched for Saul in Acts 9 and the church in Jerusalem sent him to investigate the Gentiles coming to faith in Acts 11. Sometimes God sends an individual who is known, trusted, and experienced in the church out into full-time Christian ministry.

You might be someone who helped found Cornerstone in 2015. Maybe you helped found Immanuel Church in 1896. God might be calling you to full-time ministry or to become a missionary. I suspect Barnabas was an older man by this point. God might be calling you to a second career in ministry.

When I was at my D.Min program in October one of our professors mentioned how when retirement was first imagined it was imagined as a never-ending vacation. But that has rung a bit hollow, hasn't it? Those in their sixties and seventies are some of the most capable people we have; with years and years of experience. Do we really want to spend all that experience and wisdom on a golf course? Just imagine what God might want to do through you. Maybe he wants to send you to the mountains of Afghanistan, the jungles of Brazil, or the plains of Mongolia to share the love of Christ.

I recently watched the sermon John Piper gave at the Passion OneDay 2000 missions conference in Shelby Farms, Tennessee. Piper talked about the death of two of their church's missionaries: Ruby Eliason, an eighty year old missionary who gave her entire life to sharing Christ to "the unreached, the poor, and the sick" and Laura Edwards, "a widow, a medical doctor, pushing eighty years old, and serving at Ruby's side in Cameroon." The brakes gave way in their car and they went off a cliff and died instantly. Piper said this is not a tragedy. It's glorious how they gave their lives for Jesus. Then he added this.

I tell you what a tragedy is. I'll read to you from Reader's Digest what a tragedy is. "Bob and Penny . . . took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their thirty foot trawler, playing softball and collecting shells."

That's a tragedy.

Are you a seashell Christian? Barnabas wasn't. God can use you to do mighty things, especially in retirement. Barnabas led the church, disciplined Paul, and went on the first missionary trip ever recorded. The Holy Spirit can call anyone, even you.

Simeon and Lucius - Cross-cultural missionaries.

God also uses people who are different than the culture to reach the culture. Both Simeon and Lucius were culturally different than the Jews and Greeks. “Simeon who was called Niger”—niger means “black” in Latin. “Lucius of Cyrene”—Cyrene is in northern Africa in modern day Libya. In Antioch, north of Jerusalem in Turkey, both of these men were cross-cultural. They might have felt out of place. What could God do with me? I’m not even from here? But God wants to use them. He doesn’t use them on the same missionary journey he uses Paul and Barnabas, but he uses them where he calls them. God might want to use you in a cross-cultural setting, maybe in a foreign country, or in a cross-cultural community in this country.

Manaen - Ministry to the rich and powerful.

Manaen was “a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch.” This isn’t the Herod from last week, Herod Agrippa I who executed James, one of the twelve disciples. Manaen was friends with his uncle, Herod Antipas, the one responsible for executing John the Baptist. God sovereignly raised Manaen among the rich and powerful, putting him in a unique position to minister to those who need Jesus as much as anyone else.

One of my other D.Min mentors mentioned that one of the things that made Dwight L. Moody so effective in founding Moody Bible Institute was that he wasn’t afraid to approach the wealthy of Chicago to show them how God could use their money to grow his kingdom. One of Moody’s famous investors, John V. Farwell, founded Marshall Field’s, which Macy’s acquired in 2005. God might be calling you to minister to the rich and powerful. I believe the Great Commission in Matthew 28 isn’t just a geographic commission, but Jesus calls us to go out and make disciples in every sphere of society, the rich and the poor, those like us, and those who are cross cultural. The Holy Spirit can call anyone.

Paul (Saul) - The budding all star.

Barnabas just traveled up to Tarsus looking for Saul (Paul) to help him preach the gospel to the Jews and Gentiles in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas preached at the church in Antioch for a year but now God is sending them out. While Saul has known Christ for over a decade by this point, it’s still painful to lose him because he’s full of excitement and passion for what God can do, and he’s particularly gifted in preaching, teaching, and leading.

God might be calling us to give up our budding all stars for his greater kingdom. These are especially painful to lose because we want to keep them. We want God to use them to grow our ministries and churches; but God actually has a different calling for them. I believe as we give away God will actually grow our ministry. Are you gifted? God might be calling you to use your gifts to serve him.

Some of you may know Francis Chan as the super-passionate gifted and famous pastor and author he is today. But back when he was a teenager, back before Francis Chan became Francis Chan, one of the things the Lord used to convict him was his youth pastor asking him this question, “...what would your church (and the worldwide church) look like if everyone was as committed as you are?” If everyone served at the commitment level you serve, would the church sink or swim? What could God do through you if you were fully devoted to him? What could God do through a church that was fully devoted to him?

Is God calling you to ministry? To missions? How can you know?

The Holy Spirit calls through the congregation.

The church came together and set aside a special time to worship the Lord, fast, and pray. That’s when the Holy Spirit spoke.

Acts 13:2 (ESV) While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

The Holy Spirit speaks to the congregation. We don't know how exactly he did this. Maybe it was a general sense the whole congregation felt. Maybe the Holy Spirit audibly spoke. Whatever way he did it, he made his will known to the whole church. The Greek word “called” means “to summon” or “appoint.” The Holy Spirit gave a special appointment to Saul and Barnabas and the whole church recognized it. They probably saw it through their teachings, but then affirmed it here again.

Even though it's the congregation that recognizes Barnabas and Saul's calling, it's clear that the Holy Spirit is working through the congregation. Verse 3 ends by saying the congregation “sent them off” and verse 4 begins by saying they were “sent out by the Holy Spirit...” Which one is it? Did the church send them? Or did the Holy Spirit send them? Yes! Both the church and the Spirit sent them. God likes to work through the church body to send his people out to do ministry and missions.

As part of my application process to seminary the church I grew up at in Colorado endorsed my going. Once I decided to go, I heard other people affirm it. I asked Monica if I could share her story. Did you know that her life plan was to go to law-school? She actually took the LSAT and scored pretty high. Then her youth pastor, Dana Smith and his wife, sat her down and said, “You seem to really enjoy volunteering with the youth group. Are you sure you want to go to law school? We think you should go to seminary instead.” Her church family recognized her gifting and calling and dared to suggest God might be doing something special in her life. The Holy Spirit calls through the church.

The Holy Spirit makes his will known through prayer and fasting.

Acts 13:3 (ESV) Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

The congregation took the time to seek the Holy Spirit through prayer and fasting. Fasting gives you the space to hear from God, to not just be satisfied with food. Fasting can make you more susceptible to things like anger and frustration; but it can help you yearn for God's face and direction.

In 2019 we spent 40 days praying and fasting as a church and I think it made a difference in the direction and movement of the church. That fall we moved to Sundays and added a Christian Education hour. That plan had stalled behind the scenes; but about two months after our time of prayer and fasting it accelerated fast.

To prepare us for those 40 days back in March 2019 I preached a sermon on prayer and fasting where I shared this story from Pastor John Piper's book, *A Hunger for God*. The story originally belonged to Carl Lundquist, the President of Bethel College who founded a missions movement.

My own serious consideration of fasting as a spiritual discipline began as a result of visiting Dr. Joon Gon Kim in Seoul, Korea. “Is it true,” I asked him, “that you spent 40 days in fasting prior to the evangelism crusade in 1980?” “Yes,” he responded, “it is true.” Dr. Kim was chairman of the crusade expected to bring a million people to Yoido Plaza. But six months before the meeting the police informed him they were revoking their permission for the crusade. Korea at that time was in political turmoil and Seoul was under martial law. The officers decided they could not take the risk of having so many people together in one place. So Dr. Kim and some associates went to a prayer mountain and there spent 40 days before God in prayer and fasting for the crusade. Then they returned and made their way to the police station. “Oh,” said the officer when he saw Dr. Kim, “we have changed our mind and you can have your meeting!” (*A Hunger for God* - p. 65) (By John Piper. © Desiring God Foundation. Source: desiringGod.org)

If you're wondering if God might be calling you into full-time ministry, ask a couple people to help discern the process with you. Ask them to pray and fast with you. If they can't fast food, maybe they can fast screens or social media or something like that. Praying and fasting makes a difference.

Back when I worked for the Farm Credit Administration I made it a goal to pray every day at noontime for one of my coworkers. We had lots of great conversations but he didn't come to Christ. But God did call me to seminary in those six months. I wonder if there's a connection. Maybe more time in prayer helped me recognize the calling God put on my life. How can we pray for you? If you're sensing God might be calling you to ministry or missions, can we pray with you? Can we discern with you? The Holy Spirit makes his will known through prayer and fasting.

Is God calling you to ministry? It's a wonderful thing to be called to ministry or missions. We're all called to ministry where we already are; but sometimes God calls us to full-time church ministry or missions, and that's a special thing. But count the cost because it's a costly calling.

The Holy Spirit calls you to the cruciform life.

As we'll see in Acts, Paul endures beatings, being stoned, shipwrecks, and ultimately, execution at the hand of the Roman authorities (2 Cor 11:25). Church tradition says Barnabas was also martyred.

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” - Jesus (Matthew 16:24b-25 ESV)

Will you deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow Jesus? If you do, I guarantee two things—suffering, and yet, eternal life with Jesus. Lose your life with Jesus. Jesus gave up his life for you. He gave up his life to save you. Repent, believe, pick up your cross and follow him, wherever he will lead you. The Holy Spirit calls to the cruciform life. Come, pick up your cross, and die with Jesus.

Romans 10:14-15 (ESV) 14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references. You can also listen on [Apple podcasts](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. Do you sense God might be calling you to ministry or missions? What makes you think that?
2. How can we as a church body help pray for and discern the callings of our church members?
3. Do you know anyone you think might be called to ministry? How can you encourage them? Will you pray for them?
4. When are you next going to time praying and fasting for the Lord to send you or others into full-time ministry or missionary work?
5. How does the gospel help us endure in the suffering we will encounter in ministry? How does the gospel encourage us and motivate us to go out on mission?

Sources

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